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CHRISTIAN SOCIOLOGY. VI.

SOCIAL LIFE.

It is not difficult to see that the principle of fraternity must especially apply to those forms of social life outside the family circle which are neither political nor economic. In nothing do the better instincts of modern life more strenuously exert themselves than in the attempt so to adjust social relations that the chasms caused by differences in wealth and culture may be, if not abolished, at least bridged. Almost in the same proportion as one comes under the control of altruistic motives do these motives result in revolt against conventional distinctions, and an attempt at brotherliness, or at least neighborliness. This is at least one interpretation to be put upon not only socialism, but upon our new charitable movements and organizations and especially upon social settlements. Confessedly these new motives are Christian; nothing could be more so; but it may not be without results to follow the application of his general principle to social matters by Jesus himself.

I.

It may seem gratuitous to assert that Jesus was no ascetic or even semi-ascetic puritan. So far has the pendulum swung away from the mediæval conception of holiness that it often seems as if the chief need of today is a new Savonarola who shall fascinate the nineteenth century into new burnings of novels and gewgaws. But none the less, so ineradicable is the suspicion that religion is in some way a sort of prophylactic against the joys of life, that it is often forgotten that the founder of Christianity came eating and drinking,—in the envious eyes of contemporary religious teachers a winebibber and a glutton.¹

¹ Matt. 11 : 19.

It was in fact because he was so normal that Jesus' career was darkened by men's distrust. John the Baptist, whose work in a fashion Jesus may be said to have continued and completed, was quite another man. The prophet's dress and the pauper's food together with his sternly ascetic preaching gave him a popularity and a permanent position among the Jews which Jesus during his life can hardly be said to have attained.¹ Even nowadays it is by no means so easy to attract the crowds by respectability as by eccentricity and sensations. It is infinitely easier to preach against fashionable extravagances and social absurdities than to recall men to gentlemanly unobtrusiveness in goodness. Too many men measure their goodness by their sense of deprivation, making misery the thermometer of holiness.

But Jesus was evidently not of this class of charlatans and semi-ascetics. It cannot have escaped the notice of even the conventional reader of the New Testament that in the fourth gospel Jesus begins his Galilean ministry by providing a wedding company with new means for enjoyment.² And this was only one instance out of many in which Jesus used social gatherings for the furthering of his mission. In fact much of his teaching was connected with dining—the social meal giving either the occasion or the analogy for his thought. He distinctly rejected fasting as a religious form,³ and destroyed all ceremonial distinctions in food.⁴ If sometimes he himself fasted,⁵ it was from no desire to acquire merit, and if he withdrew into solitude it

¹The hold that John had upon the minds of his contemporaries is to be seen not only in the oldest sources of our gospels (see for instance Mark 1:1-8) but also in the pages of Josephus (*Ant.* 18; 5:2). By the latter writer the misfortunes that filled the later days of Herod Antipas are said to have been popularly regarded as judgments for the killing of John. Even if, as very likely is the case, this reference to John has been subjected to interpolations, it stands on much surer critical ground than Josephus' reference to Jesus himself (*Ant.* 18; 3:3). Other tributes to the permanence of John's influence are seen in Acts 18:25; 19:3.

²John 2:1-12. It is impossible to think that the conditions of this story are fulfilled by the assumption that the wine provided by Jesus was non-alcoholic.

³Matt. 9:14; 6:17, 18. In this connection the picture of the boasting Pharisee (Luke 18:10) is especially striking.

⁴Mark 7:17, 19.

⁵Matt. 4:12. Luke 4:2.

was for a brief season of prayer from which he returned the more devotedly to enter into public life.¹ For months he lived almost constantly surrounded by crowds.

But while the pleasures of social life are good in themselves, they are not to be ends in themselves. Life consists in something more than food,² and the kingdom of God, as Paul said later, was not to consist in mere sensual enjoyment.³ That something which can make eating and drinking goods subordinate to some greater good is the spirit of brotherliness in which they become means of furthering the happiness of others. The member of the new society was not to flee the world,⁴ but was rather to stay in it as a source of light and life.⁵ Social life was shown both by the words and life of Jesus to be the normal life of men. Just as marriage was the ideal form of the life of the individual, so the family and the feast were used by Jesus as the nearest analogies to what life in the new social order was to be. Friendships are to Jesus' mind instinctive and their fruit of necessity, kindliness.⁶

II.

It is not to magnify trivialities if attention be called to the attitude of Jesus towards the conventionalities of life. It is of course possible that a man should be thoroughly good and worthy of respect and yet be totally indifferent to the requirements of society. Many men today are undoubtedly nobly affecting the life of their communities through their sterling integrity and deep religious feeling who are ignorant or careless of conventionalities. But no cultured man wants a boor as his religious teacher any more than he would accept a filthy saint as his Savior. Even John the Baptist was less than the least in the kingdom of God.⁷ And it is nothing more than we should have expected when we find Jesus careful about those matters which indicate the gentleman. Though a poor man, and counting clothes as at best but a secondary good⁸ he seems to have

¹ Mark 6:46 *sq.* Matt. 14:23 *sq.* Luke 9:28.

² Matt. 6:25.

³ Rom. 14:17.

⁵ Matt. 5:14.

⁷ Matt. 11:11.

⁴ John 17:15.

⁶ Luke 11:5-8; 15:9.

⁸ Matt. 6:25, 28.

been well dressed¹ and to have followed the ordinary dictates of the Jewish fashions except, perhaps, in the matter of phylacteries.² His sensitiveness to matters of common civility appears in the words forced from him by the rudeness of a host who allowed conceit to drive out politeness.³ Indeed it would seem as if the fact that Judas should have betrayed him by a kiss added bitterness to the cup he was forced to drink.⁴

These matters are, of course, of small importance as they stand by themselves, but they gain in significance when they are seen to represent an attitude of mind. Conduct is always less hypocritical than language, and in the case of Jesus it had the added responsibility serving as an example for his followers. Accordingly, it is doubly necessary in his case to look for the spirit and ideal of which conduct is the expression. Such a spirit is clearly not that of the ascetic; but is it not equally opposed to that of the "man about town?"

Whether it may have been from this sensitiveness or from some other motive, as a matter of fact, Jesus, with all his love and eagerness to attract men, never cheapened himself by indiscriminate friendships. From one point of view, his brief career was marked by great reserve; indeed, it seems hardly more than a series of withdrawals from men in order that he might establish a few intense friendships. To the outer crowd he carefully refused to show the depths of his character; to the wide circle of mercurial "believers" he revealed hardly more of himself; to the Twelve as a whole he showed as much of himself as he could educate them to appreciate. But when he found a man or woman to whom he could open his heart, then all that they

¹ John 19:23.

² Matt. 9:20. The rabbis seem to have been as supreme in fashion as in religion. We know from their decisions not only the names and styles of the garments worn by Jews but also the order in which they should be put on and their relative importance. (The authority in the subject of Jewish costume is BRÜLL, *Trachten der Juden*. See also EDERSHEIM, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, 621 *sg.*) The fact to be especially noticed in this connection is probability that Jesus wore the *tsitsith* or tassels on his *tallith* or outer garment.

³ Luke 7:36-50.

⁴ Luke 22:48.

wished to receive of him was theirs to receive. His joys and his sorrows alike might be shared by them. Some men are at their best in public; others, among their intimates. The first come dangerously near acting; the latter are seldom insincere. Jesus belonged emphatically to the second class. He would not cast his pearls before swine.¹ Thus it came about that while he was followed by multitudes, he was loved by only a few.

III.

Jesus does not recognize the existence of social classes in the new order of society. His limitations of intimacy were not based upon accidental differences. Such anomalies as exist within an unhealthy society were naturally impossible within a society composed of normal men. So long as men were bad, so long they could not be other than selfish. All of their efforts could be only for private advantage. Wealth could not fail to be other than a means for ungenerous enjoyment.² Prayer would lengthen itself immoderately that the Creator might be wearied into submission to the more persistent will.³ Social customs would be only new agencies for forcing an indebted acquaintance to repay hospitality in kind.⁴ Jesus saw all this clearly; and he saw its inevitable outgrowth: the stratification of men according to their ability to fulfill these purely materialistic conditions. With such stratification fraternity would be impossible. Therefore in the kingdom no man was to be called master, for they were all brethren,⁵ serving one another. No more striking lesson of humility was ever given than that of the Christ going about with a towel washing the feet of his followers.⁶ So emphatically does Jesus preach the gospel of equality as to say that in the coming order, the last should be first, and the first last.⁷

Yet he does not, like some modern champions of equality,

¹ Matt. 7:6.

³ Matt. 7:7.

⁵ Matt. 23:8.

² Luke 12:16-20.

⁴ Luke 14:12.

⁶ John 13:1-10.

⁷ Matt. 19:30. No sentence of Jesus seems to have made deeper impression on his hearers. It is constantly repeated in the gospels.

attempt the sudden destruction of all traditional distinctions. There is undoubtedly need of such iconoclasts, for reforms like revolutions are seldom made of rose-water, but that constructive spirit which is everywhere noticeable in the career of Jesus is present here in large measure. Social revolutions quite as likely as political produce demagogues, and even more quickly tempt men to denunciations that are the more violent because more indiscriminate. But Jesus kept himself from all such extremes. He himself belonged to the artisan class,¹ and knew what it was to feel the contempt of the professional teachers of his people,² and he did not hesitate to confess the immense advantage possessed by the educated man,³ but he never allowed these facts to lead him into tirade against other men's advantages.

It is however by no means inconsistent with this attitude that he recognized, that as things are constituted, men must of necessity be divided into servants and employés. He said nothing that condemned such a relation, and indeed at times spoke of it as a most natural thing.⁴ But this is simply the attitude that any practical man must take in his reforming of society. Your amateur reformer would dissolve society into its elements. Like Robespierre and other doctrinaires, he will break with the past, even though he brings the bones of departed kings to the lime-pit. But Jesus was never so crude a thinker as to imagine that society is a mechanical mixture of elements into which it must be disintegrated as a step towards a happier recombination. With him progress was biological, an evolution rather than a revolution. And therefore he did not destroy all social conventionalities or a traditional division of labor.

But to be a servant is not to be any less a man or, provided it is really the case, any less the equal of any man in another calling. If nothing that goes into a man can defile him, certainly no necessary work is dishonorable. If Jesus the carpenter and the son of a carpenter could become Jesus the Christ; if his

¹ Mark 6:3; 13:55.

³ Matt. 13:52.

² Matt. 13:54-56.

⁴ Luke 17:7-10; Matt. 10:24.

seemingly Falstaffian army of fishermen, tax-collectors, and reformed revolutionists, could become in a few months the pillars of the great church at Jerusalem and the evangelists of the world; it is unnecessary to argue as to Jesus' recognition of the equality of men as men. Indeed, nothing is more admirable than the catholicity of sympathy and practice that made him the friend of all sorts of people. Yet nothing more scandalized the aristocratic teachers and preachers and lawyers of his own day. How often did they rail against him as a friend of the publican and sinner! In their sight he could be no prophet, since he dared receive a repentant woman of the town.¹ With them as with all legalists the temptation was strong to judge harshly and superficially of all unusual characters, and their criticism of the generous habits of Jesus was a testimony to the openness of his sympathy with honest effort at reform and his disregard of all artificial distinctions. To the Pharisees the common people who knew not the law were accursed: to Jesus they were possible members of his kingdom.²

And his words were the echoes of his life. One of the proofs of his Messiahship that the disciples of John were to carry back to their unfortunate master was that the gospel was being preached to the poor.³ When a man was to give a feast, Jesus bade him invite the lame and the halt and the blind.⁴ Could social equality combined with an avoidance of self-seeking be more strikingly enforced?

IV.

Various objections may be urged to this conception of Jesus as a preacher of social equality.

1. It may be said that he discriminated against Samaritans and gentiles, holding both himself and his disciples straitly to a mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."⁵ Yet even assuming (which is quite absurd) that such a distinction is a distinction between social classes, it would be enough to reply

¹ Luke 7:36 *sq.*

³ Matt. 11:5; Luke 7, 22.

⁵ Matt. 10:6; 15:24.

² John 7:49; Matt. 11:28.

⁴ Luke 14:13 *sq.*

that such a limitation was but a concentration. As the results showed, it was eminent sagacity that forbade the dissipation of energy and the extension of preaching by men not yet thoroughly imbued with his own spirit. In the plans of Jesus the evangelization of Jerusalem was to lead to that of Judea and Samaria and ultimately of the uttermost parts of the earth.¹ But as a more immediate reply it would be sufficient to match the story of Zacchaeus² with that of the Syro-Phœnician woman; and the words to the Twelve as they went out to a final conquest of the world with the advice given to them as they made their first experiment at heralding a disappointing Jewish Messiah.

2. It may be also urged that Jesus attacked the rich and educated classes and championed the poor. But such attacks and championings are rather proofs of his equalizing purpose. Princes were to be put down from their thrones and those of low degree were to be exalted,³ not that in their new conditions they might perpetuate old distinctions, but that it might be made evident that personality and not position or wealth is supreme. Equality with Jesus was not to be attained by equalizing wealth or honor, but by the possession of a common divine life, the enjoyment of equal privileges, and the performance of equal duties. It is moral not material.

It is true that Jesus attacked bitterly the upper classes, and at times seemed unduly to praise the poor and needy, but it is a superficial study that does not discover that these attacks spring from his perception of the evident anti-fraternal, selfish, contemptuous spirit of the Pharisees. In none of his words is there a touch of demagogism. A man was no more worse because he was rich than he was holier because he was miserable. Indeed, if there is anything that projects above the other teachings of Jesus it is the duty of every member of the kingdom of God to treat every man as his equal. This was to be not a mere social fiction but a test of devotion and character. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye love one another."⁴ To be a neighbor to a man is not to belong to the

¹ Acts 1:8.² Luke 19:2 *sq.*³ Luke 1:52, 53.⁴ John 13:35.

same community, or set, or nation. It is to disregard all such artificial distinctions and to give him such help as he may need.¹ He who has such a spirit will ever be the Good Samaritan and to him every sufferer will be the man fallen among robbers.

3. Yet probably the strongest objection in the way of an actual recognition of this ideal of Jesus in actual life is the ineradicable conviction that social equality is impracticable. Men have dreamed of it and have died, leaving their dreams to the laughter of their times and the libraries of their descendants. These words of Jesus are beautiful but so are those of More and Rousseau—and no less visionary. Men are not equal and fraternity is a word for oratory and French public buildings.

So men say, or think if they keep silent.

As to practicability of these and other teachings of Jesus there will be something to say in a later paper. The reply to this objection to be made here is this: Jesus does not claim that men in the world today are physiologically equal. There are the lame and halt. Nor are they mentally on an equality. There are men to whom one talent was given, and those to whom five and ten.² Nor does Jesus so far fall into the class of nature-philosophers as to teach that because men are to be brothers they are therefore to be twins. The equality of fraternity does not consist in duplication of powers, but in the enjoyment of love.

According to the new social standard of Jesus two men are equal not because they have equal claims upon each other but because they owe equal duties to each other. The gospel is not a new Declaration of Rights, but a Declaration of Duties.³ As to what equality shall consist in when the perfect social order is attained Jesus gives us no clear teaching. But one can hardly doubt it would be little different. Men would then be brothers and society an all-embracing family, but individuality is not to be lost. And individuality is synonymous with personal inequalities.

¹ Luke 10. 25-37.

² Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-27.

³ The constitutional history of the French Revolution is a commentary upon this position of Jesus. It was a new age that replaced the *Declaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of the constitution of 1791, with the *Declaration des Droits et des Devoirs de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of the constitution of Fructidor, 1795.

V.

But this is a speculation into which Jesus did not enter. He is especially concerned with the evolving kingdom, and here his words are explicit. Social and economic distinctions are artificial and temporary. Differences in wealth and employment are to be no hindrance to fraternity. To use the noble words of Paul, who here again seems more than all men of the first century to have reached the heart of Jesus, in the new social order "there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free."¹

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¹ Gal. 3 : 28.